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NOTE

From:	Working Party on Social Questions
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States - <i>General approach</i>

I. INTRODUCTION

On 15 February 2016, the Commission submitted a proposal for a Decision of the Council on Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, based on Article 148(2) TFEU, considering that the guidelines for Member States' employment policies as set out in the Annex to Council Decision of 5 October 2015¹ should be maintained for 2016.

The Employment Committee finalised its opinion at its meeting of 16 February 2016 (doc. 6153/16), agreeing with the Commission's proposal to maintain the 2015 Employment Guidelines.

¹ Council Decision 2015/1848 of 5 October 2015 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States for 2015 (OJ L 268, 15.10.2015, p. 28).

The opinions of the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions are still pending.

On 22 February 2016, the Social Questions Working Party examined the proposal and agreed on the general approach to maintain the 2015 Employment Guidelines, while slightly amending the draft proposal regarding the recitals taking into account delegations' comments.

The text of the draft Decision is annexed to this report. The changes introduced in relation to the Commission proposal (doc. 6152/16), following the SQWP on 22 February, are marked by **bold**. At this stage it is considered that all delegations have positive scrutiny reservations on these amendments.

The UK delegation has maintained its parliamentary scrutiny reservation.

II. CONCLUSION

It is suggested that the Permanent Representatives Committee invites the Council (EPSCO) to agree on a general approach at its meeting on 7 March 2016.

The general approach will need to be reconsidered when the conclusions of the March European Council can also be taken into account and once all the opinions required under Article 148(2) of the Treaty have been received.

Proposal for a

COUNCIL DECISION

on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 148(2) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament²,

Having regard to the opinion of the Employment Committee,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee³,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions⁴,

Whereas:

- (1) The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) stipulates in Article 145 that Member States and the Union shall work towards developing a coordinated strategy for employment and particularly for promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce as well as labour markets that are responsive to economic change and with a view to achieving the objectives defined in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

² OJ C , , p. .

³ OJ C , , p. .

⁴ OJ C , , p. .

- (2) On 14 July 2015, the Council adopted its Recommendation (EU) 2015/1184 on broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and of the Union. Furthermore, on 5 October 2015, the Council adopted its Decision (EU) 2015/1848 ('employment guidelines'). Those sets of guidelines form the integrated guidelines for implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy ('integrated guidelines'). The "Europe 2020 Strategy" proposed by the Commission enables the Union to turn its economy towards smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, accompanied by high level employment, productivity and social cohesion. Five headline targets, listed under the relevant guidelines, constitute shared objectives which guide the action of the Member States, and take into account their relative starting positions and national circumstances as well as the positions and circumstances of the Union. The European Employment Strategy has the leading role in the implementation of the employment and labour market objectives of the new strategy.
- (3) The integrated guidelines are in line with the conclusions of the European Council. They give precise guidance to the Member States on defining their National Reform Programmes and implementing reforms, reflecting interdependence and in line with the Stability and Growth Pact. The employment guidelines should form the basis for any country-specific recommendations that the Council may address to the Member States under Article 148(4) of the TFEU, in parallel with the country-specific recommendations addressed to the Member States under Article 121(2) of that Treaty. The employment guidelines should also form the basis for the establishment of the Joint Employment Report sent annually by the Council and the European Commission to the European Council.
- (4) The examination of Member States' National Reform Programmes contained in the Joint Employment Report shows that Member States should make every effort **to boost demand for labour, enhance labour supply, skills and competences, enhance the functioning of labour market, foster social inclusion, combat poverty and promote equal opportunities.**
- (5) Member States should explore the use of the European Social Fund when implementing the Employment Guidelines.

- 5(i) The employment guidelines should remain stable to ensure a focus on their implementation. Any updating of the employment guidelines should therefore remain strictly limited and, on the basis of an assessment of the developments of the labour markets and the social situation, since their adoption in 2015, such update is not called for. The reasons for the adoption of the Guidelines in 2015 remain valid and those Guidelines should be maintained.**

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

The guidelines for Member States' employment policies as set out in the Annex to Council Decision of 5 October 2015 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States⁵ are maintained for 2016 and shall be taken into account by the Member States in their employment policies.

Article 2

This Decision is addressed to the Member States.

Done at Brussels,

For the Council

The President

⁵ Council Decision (EU) 2015/1848 of 5 October 2015 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (OJ L 268, 15.10.2015, p. 28).